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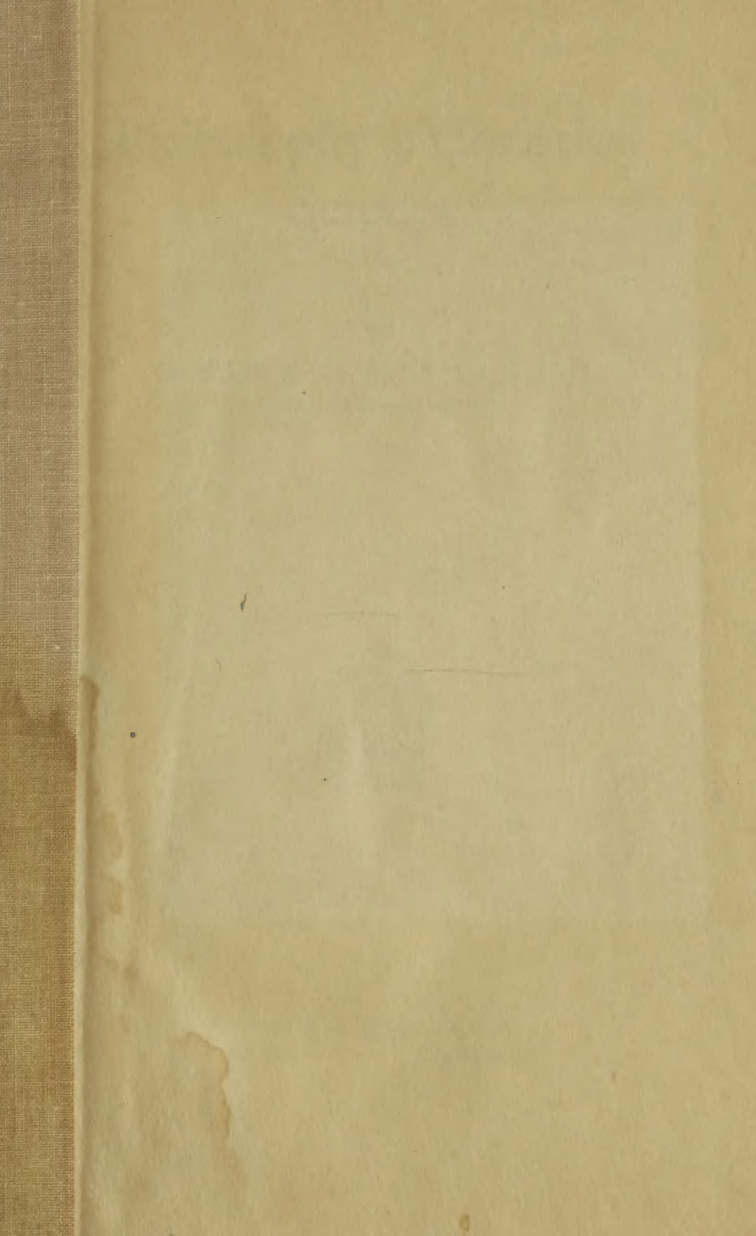
Philosophy of Christian Science.

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Philosophy of Christian Science

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PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN SCIENCE



AM asked to say a word about the philosophy of Christian Science. I am the more willing to do this, as I find I am frequently referred to by the leaders of this cult, not, indeed, as holding their view, but as having a philosophy which readily lends itself to it.

The claim we commonly hear in this connection is that pain, disease and evil in general are unreal, and hence exist only in our thought. We have only to correct our thought then, and they vanish into their native nothingness. In this claim the Christian Scientist falls a prey to the confusion which infests the word reality—a confusion continually manifesting itself in philosophical literature.

Without stopping to recite the various meanings of this word, it suffices to point out that all our thinking about life and the world must begin with experience, and that experience itself must be accepted as real. But when we speak of the reality of experience we do not mean to say anything metaphysical,

but simply to state that the objects of experience, these things and persons about us, whatever may be their ultimate nature, are facts with which we have to reckon and to which we have to adjust ourselves in order to live. The order of external nature is something we cannot ignore, and the order of our physical dependence is something we cannot escape. Now experience in this sense makes up the great contents of life, and the knowledge of experience in this sense and of the way in which its factors hang together is the sum of practical wisdom. Whether we shall call it real or not is a matter of very little moment, provided we observe that, whatever we call it, it has to be recognized just the same, and that we have to adjust ourselves to it, under whatever name, if we are to live. In this sense, then, experience is real, and practically this is a most important sense and no metaphysics would make it more or less real for practical purposes. To illustrate:

We find on studying this order of experience that there are certain ways of being and happening in it. Things coexist in certain ways and events succeed one another according to certain laws. If we decide to call these things phenomena the experience is not changed. If we call them illusions still the experience is not changed. If we

call them nothings still the experience is not changed, and practical science remains just what it was before. Or suppose we were agnostics with regard to the physical elements, and should say we have no idea what the true nature of, say, oxygen and hydrogen may be. We still know that a certain quantity of what we *call* oxygen can be united with a certain quantity of what we *call* hydrogen to form a certain quantity of what we *call* water, and that we can use this thing we call water in a great many ways of practical importance. Or if we should call these things ideas we still know that the hydrogen idea can be united with the oxygen idea to produce the water idea and the water idea can be manipulated so as to produce a lot of other ideas. Or, finally, if we should call them nothings we know that the hydrogen nothing can be united with the oxygen nothing to form the water nothing, and the water nothing may give rise to a good many other nothings, and life remains just what it was before.

It is, then, a great mistake to fancy that our metaphysics is the source of experience, or that it in any way makes the experience real or unreal. The experience stands absolutely in its own right, whether the metaphysicians can make anything out of it or

not. And the experience remains the same under one system of metaphysics as under another. Thus Berkeley, Mill, and Hume and Reid and Hamilton differed widely in their metaphysics, but practically they had to live in the same way. Kant, with his ideality of space and time, found it no easier to get around in the world than the ordinary realist on that subject. Berkeley found his butcher's bill and his grocer's bill just as important a matter, and just as difficult to pay, as Reid. So on the plane of experience we are all alike and the philosophers cannot help us. Neither can they molest us or make us afraid. If the philosophers can do anything it must be in the way of interpreting experience, not in the way of producing or verifying it.

In this sense, then, experience is real and carries its truth or verification in itself. It may be that the study of experience would compel us to go behind it to find its causal explanation and this would carry us out into the field of metaphysics, but it can never lead us behind it in the way of denying the experience, for experience is both first and last, first as the foundation of our theorizing and last as that by which the theorizing must be judged.

Now this fact is overlooked by a great

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many philosophers and also by the Christian Science speculators. They point out that matter is unreal, and various other things are unreal, and then conclude that this unreality in some ways affects the experience. In truth the affirmation is a metaphysical one. Thus we may say that disease and pain are not realities, meaning thereby that they are not substances. We can also say that sin is not a reality, evil is not a reality, death is not a reality, and as substantive facts, of course, they are not real. Or we might say with certain pantheistic philosophers that the finite is not real, meaning thereby that over against the infinite substance finite things are transitory or dependent. But all of these statements are metaphysical, and have no bearing upon the reality of experience. Pain is not real as a thing, but is an actual occurrence in experience. Disease is not a substance, but it is a condition, nevertheless, from which we suffer. Death is only an event, but still it is appointed unto all men once to die. It is plain that these things remain, whatever name we give them, and that we have to adjust ourselves to them, whatever our metaphysics may be. Hunger may be an illusion, but the only known way of effectively dealing with it is by securing a certain other kind of illusion, known as food,

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and applying the latter to the removal of the former. So with cold and divers other unpleasant facts, they may be illusions, but they will be very grievous illusions unless we apply other illusions known as shelter, clothing, warmth and the like. Arsenic may be an illusion or non-existent, but we must not swallow it, nevertheless. A live wire may be an illusion, but we must not take hold of it. Our bodies also may be illusions, but we must at least treat them in certain ways, otherwise certain other unpleasant illusions will be sure to arise. If they were absolutely real we should not be more bound by them than we are.

It is plain, then, that the order of experience is something which we cannot produce at will or dismiss at pleasure. Whatever our metaphysics, it is practically as real for the most determined idealist as it would be for the most besotted realist. If anyone is in doubt on this point let him make the experiment. Let him consider whether he could stand out of doors in scanty clothing through a January blizzard, whether he could swallow safely strychnine in large doses, handle a live wire, put his hand in the fire, chop off his fingers, sit comfortably on a cake of ice, renounce food, and so forth. Here is a large field for experiment for anyone who

doubts and wishes to try and see. And before long it will appear that there is an order of experience which for all practical purposes is real. That is, we do not produce it and we cannot escape it. We have to adjust ourselves to it whether we like it or not, if we expect to live.

Now a Christian Scientist who admits this differs practically from the rest of us in nothing but words. His theoretical difference, if there be any, lies in the field of metaphysics, and that is purely a matter of speculation. If he insists that his metaphysics can exorcise a blizzard or quench the violence of fire or put to flight the many ills that flesh is heir to, or do away with hunger and cold and pain, then, as just suggested, there is ample room for decisive experiment. By keeping this point in mind we shall at least escape the confusion that arises from the ambiguity of this word reality, and we may have a chance to test the validity of our notions. In the long run the death rate seems to be about one apiece for all of us, Christian Scientists and other folk alike.

Apart from this misplaced metaphysics, the doctrine appears to be simply an emphasis of a truth quite overlooked in the recent materialistic period, and never until lately duly emphasized by medical science, namely, that

the state of mind has great significance for health or disease, and that, therefore, the wise thing for all persons to do, who hope to live, is to maintain as much cheerfulness and hopefulness and courage as possible. With this understanding Christianity is probably the best prescription for successful living that can be given. Trust God, do your best and be not afraid. This is the gist of the matter, and this calls for no expensive outlay for healers or other persons financially interested.



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